

# Update for schools

Cambridge Pre-U is an exciting post-16 qualification preparing learners for university



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## Making the switch

**Changing to Cambridge Pre-U requires time and planning but leads to exciting new possibilities.**

The introduction of Cambridge Pre-U into a post-16 curriculum is often prompted by a drive to stimulate students and encourage independent learning. Switching qualifications – rather than adding a new subject – requires careful preparation and detailed consultation with students, teachers, parents and governors. If planned meticulously, however, switching can be relatively stress-free, and leads to a wide range of exciting possibilities.

Hampton School, in London, is currently switching to Cambridge Pre-U Mathematics, a process which Head of Mathematics Joanna Condon describes as a ‘department-

wide undertaking’, which the school began in 2015.

‘We were prompted to research new qualifications following changes to the A Level Mathematics specification,’ explains Joanna. ‘Other departments at Hampton School already offered Cambridge Pre-U and we were attracted by the pared-down question style, and – in mathematics – the high expectations regarding students’ use of mathematical notation and terminology. In particular, we appreciated a mark scheme that focused on mathematical understanding rather than specific techniques, giving students scope to use different methods and not to be

overly penalised for numerical errors.’ The mathematics department began its research in 2015 and by the summer of 2016 had made its final decision. ‘There was a lot of discussion within the department regarding available options,’ says Joanna, ‘and we also spoke to other schools offering Cambridge Pre-U Mathematics and other specifications. Having made the decision to switch, we informed our current Year 11 students, and their parents, at our annual sixth form options evening which we hold in October.’

This meeting gave Joanna and her colleagues the chance to fully explain the reasons behind the switch, and

## Making the switch continued

the benefits of the Cambridge Pre-U approach: 'We're hoping that the Cambridge Pre-U syllabus will encourage students to become better problem solvers and more independent learners,' she says. 'As we are also a department of enthusiastic mathematicians, we are also looking forward to teaching a number of interesting topics which are missing from equivalent qualifications, such as complex numbers and moment-generating functions.'

Having a year to prepare was very beneficial, concludes Joanna: 'We used the time to restructure our schemes of work and to prepare resources – it has been a department-wide undertaking but we are excited by the opportunities the Cambridge Pre-U course offers.'



## Cambridge Pre-U at Hampton School

The decision to switch to Cambridge Pre-U Mathematics was based on both an analysis of the new syllabus and on the reputation Cambridge Pre-U had already gained at Hampton – here are just a few comments from other heads of department:

'The syllabus covers a much wider range of topics, some of which feature significantly in many undergraduate courses, such as thermodynamics and quantum theory. The Personal Investigation also allows students to undertake a genuine piece of research that is not prescribed by the syllabus and which develops independent working skills. Teachers also enjoy the course, and the ample opportunities to explore interesting aspects of contemporary physics.'

**Dr Mark Yates, Head of Physics**

'We enjoy the way that Cambridge Pre-U Art encourages students to take control of their learning and become more self-generating and mature in their approach. The course structure allows teachers to identify the individual strengths of students as they work their way through the different components, and the written essay gives the subject the necessary academic rigour to be considered seriously when students apply for non-art related university courses.'

**Karen Williams, Head of Art**

'Cambridge Pre-U History has been enjoyable to teach and is of great benefit to the students in the way that it prepares them for university. Former pupils have confirmed that it provides valuable lessons in how they can use their time as productively as possible once they have left Hampton – that kind of reinforcement has been encouraging for all of us.'

**Jon Cook, Head of History**

'We chose Cambridge Pre-U German in order to stretch the students and encourage more independent learning, and because of positive feedback from other schools, including reassurances that the grading is robust and accurate. Teachers have also enjoyed the freedom and flexibility of the course.'

**Sophie May, Head of German**

'Cambridge Pre-U Philosophy & Theology is superior in both content and examining to any post-reform religious studies A Level. The strong emphasis on analysis and evaluation, versus knowledge and understanding, is appreciated by teachers and valued by students. We feel that this approach also better serves the more able.'

**Dr Neal Carrier, Head of Religious Studies and Philosophy**

# Cambridge Schools Conference UK – save the date

**As this edition of the Cambridge Pre-U newsletter goes to press, preparation is well underway for the second Cambridge Schools Conference of 2017, to be held in Churchill College, Cambridge, from Wednesday 20 to Thursday 21 September.**

Our conferences are an important opportunity for education professionals from many different schools and contexts to come together to discuss common challenges facing teachers and students worldwide.

The theme for our Cambridge conference is inclusive education and overcoming barriers to learning. There will be a focus on literacy and numeracy but also on brain function and memory, with speakers from the Cognitive and Brain Sciences Unit at Cambridge University on the conference programme. It's an admittedly wide-ranging topic but we aim to give delegates a better theoretical understanding of issues surrounding inclusion, as well as a range of practical ideas to take back to the classroom.

The programme will also include speakers from academia and education, staff from Cambridge, and educational experts working in a variety of fields. The two-day event also features breakout sessions and workshops to give delegates the chance to participate more actively, and to give their thoughts on the issues being discussed, along with a number of social events and other opportunities to make new contacts and reunite with old friends.

Cambridge Schools Conferences welcome delegates from all Cambridge schools, and it's this diversity which makes the events so successful, says Paul Ellis, Head of Teaching and Learning Strategy at Cambridge: 'We aim to deliver a programme which is relevant across the curriculum, and to every qualification, including Cambridge Pre-U. It's an important opportunity for professional development, as well as a forum for shared ideas and experiences, all with the same objective of improved student outcomes. Our emphasis on the interactive also makes the conference a real opportunity to gain practical knowledge of immediate use.'

## How to register

Early registration for the Cambridge Schools Conference is encouraged as demand for places is always high – for more information, go to [www.cie.org.uk/conference](http://www.cie.org.uk/conference), where you can also view videos, presentation slides and photos from recent conferences held worldwide.

We will be holding two more conferences on the theme of inclusive education and overcoming barriers to learning – in Dubai in December 2017, and between March and May 2018 (dates and venue to be announced).



# Subject spotlight – Spanish



In every issue of our newsletter we shine a spotlight on a particular Cambridge Pre-U subject. In this issue we ask Robert Sykes, Head of Modern Languages and Spanish at North London Collegiate School, for his thoughts on Cambridge Pre-U Spanish.

## How does Cambridge Pre-U Spanish develop subject knowledge and wider skills?

The syllabus comprises traditional language teaching, with a strong emphasis on grammar, and a real insight into Hispanic culture gained by discussing current topics such as family life, historical events or political crises, and by studying films, novels and theatre. The Speaking Paper is a good example of how these combine. Students independently research a topic for discussion (such as a famous artist or historical figure), and the examiner then assesses both knowledge and understanding of the topic and spoken language skills.

## Do your students enjoy the course?

Our students know that language study at sixth form is challenging and a big step up from GCSE, but they really enjoy the Cambridge Pre-U Spanish course. They respond well to its rigour and welcome the chance to find out more about the cultural context in which Spanish is spoken. For most students, Spanish is a core subject choice, but many students also take the Cambridge Pre-U course as a contrast subject to sciences or other humanities, finding it useful and enriching, and a skill they can continue to develop throughout their lives.

## What do you and your colleagues think of the syllabus?

We really enjoy the combination of tradition and innovation, and the opportunity to share our enthusiasm and passion for Spanish language and culture. The chance to embed grammatical knowledge gives linguists real satisfaction, and we can support this technical teaching by bringing authentic

cultural sources into the classroom – the Cambridge Pre-U Spanish syllabus really stands out in this regard.

## How does Cambridge Pre-U Spanish link to university study?

Despite the recent decline in languages at university, we seem to have bucked the trend – this year almost 20 students will be studying languages at degree level, as either full or joint honours, and we think they will be well prepared for this next stage. As well as language ability, they will have gained a range of skills essential for university study such as a rigorous academic approach, and the ability to construct and justify an argument.

## You are also a Cambridge Pre-U Spanish trainer – what's your advice for teachers and schools preparing to teach the course, or considering adding it to the curriculum?

Firstly, Cambridge Pre-U teachers need a supportive languages department which is enthusiastic about both language and culture. Secondly, if your language students are new to cultural study, it may be useful to introduce this approach further down the school. At North London Collegiate School, cultural awareness is part of all language classes at Key Stages 3 and 4. Students watch films, for example, read poetry or visit exhibitions, and we find this also helps the transition from GCSE to Cambridge Pre-U. We also run exchange programmes with schools in Colombia and Granada – this is an ideal way to extend learning and to reinforce, once again, both language skills and an appreciation of cultural contexts.





# Personal Investigations – how to encourage success

**It's important for Cambridge Pre-U students to choose a Personal Investigation topic that is right for them. We ask Cambridge Pre-U History examiner Jane Hart for her advice.**

The majority of Cambridge Pre-U courses include a Personal Investigation (PI), an extended essay that can represent up to 25 per cent of total available marks. The PI allows students to follow their interests and build their subject knowledge, while also developing some of the key skills required for success at university, such as research and communication skills. The relative freedom of the PI – in terms of content, scope and independent learning – also gives students a taste of the autonomy that comes with being an undergraduate.

Excellent Cambridge Pre-U results depend on PI success – so how can teachers help their students do the best they can? We ask Jane Hart, Director of Teaching and Learning at Watford Grammar School for Girls,

and Cambridge Pre-U History examiner, for her thoughts and advice:

## **In your opinion, what are the key benefits of the PI for students?**

The PI allows students to practise those skills which are essential for successful study at university – and beyond – in a supportive environment. Student feedback very strongly suggests that because they have learnt how to use libraries in order to access articles and research material, they find these tasks much easier at university – and not just in history. In terms of developing subject knowledge, the PI gives students the chance to explore areas they feel passionate about or which they might not otherwise have been able to study, even at degree level.

Conversely, it also allows them to choose something complementary to the taught course (as long as it is not the Special Subject). One advantage of the PI is that, unlike coursework equivalents in other specifications, it is not constrained by rigid parameters. For example, there is no insistence on a particular time frame for the PI, or a set number of sources, and it is marked holistically rather than by disaggregating skills and awarding separate marks for particular assessment objectives. Consequently, students learn to research and write in a way that is most appropriate for the specific historical challenge – which is marvellous preparation for university.

## Personal Investigations – how to encourage success continued

**It's clearly very important for students to choose the 'right' PI topic in order to improve the chance of success. Should this choice be led by personal interests or skills, or both?**

It is really clear that the students who do well have chosen a topic about which they are enthusiastic. In history, general topics focused on specific individuals often do well if the student can show a real engagement with historical personality. Topics based on a particular area of historical controversy are also very likely to succeed, but with the caveat that the subject must be an area of real controversy as opposed to popularist conjecture, as these topics are usually rejected by the coursework consultants. Students can also do well if they

choose a topic from within one of their Outline papers, as the context of the material is then well understood.

**In terms of Cambridge Pre-U History, should students be encouraged to consider a topic related to the syllabus, or a completely fresh subject? And is it better to produce an in-depth investigation or choose a wider-ranging topic?**

It is impossible to generalise when it comes to topic choice. Less able or more anxious students can sometimes feel more supported if they choose a topic from the outline papers, but of greatest importance is that students find a topic that will sustain their interest over a number of months.

**How can teachers help students to write an essay title which supports the delivery of a successful PI?**

It's often sadly the case that proposals are sent off without the student having undertaken any reading about the topic whatsoever, and these submissions will be returned if there is little evidence of how the topic might be tackled. By reading widely before they write their essay title, students can ascertain whether sufficient sources are available for research, and make sure there is a point of historical debate around which to base the question. Teachers can always use the way in which examination questions are phrased as inspiration when helping their students, and coursework consultants will also suggest improvements if necessary.

“ Students can also do well if they choose a topic from within one of their Outline papers, as the context of the material is then well understood. ”

Jane Hart, Director of Teaching and Learning, Watford Grammar School for Girls



**Finally, what key advice do you have for teachers and students regarding the PI process, in terms of time management, independent study, and ensuring the final piece is the student's own work?**

It's a good idea to start the PI process ahead of the summer holiday at the end of the Lower Sixth – this gives students lots of time to research ideas and perhaps to visit libraries or (for history) historical sites. Teachers must not, of course, read any drafts but they can help maintain momentum, and check the originality of the PI, by asking students to keep a reading log. The teacher can review this regularly and use it as a prompt for discussing further reading and ideas, which is one of the joys of the syllabus for the teacher.

### Recent examples of Cambridge Pre-U History PI titles:

- What best explains the motivations of the people who went on the First Crusade?
- Were Sir Robert Peel's greatest achievements before, or after, his election victory of 1841?
- What best explains the outbreak of the Six-Day War?

# Training and events

We will be holding training courses over the next few months for the following Cambridge Pre-U subjects. Unless courses are fully booked, registration stays open until the day before the event. For more details, go to [www.cie.org.uk/events](http://www.cie.org.uk/events)

## Cambridge Pre-U

### June 2017

Mandarin Chinese  
Mathematics and Further Mathematics  
Philosophy & Theology

### October–November 2017

Art History  
French  
History  
Literature in English

### January 2018

Global Perspectives & Independent Research  
Global Perspectives (Short Course)  
Mathematics

### February 2018

Art & Design  
German  
Italian  
Music  
Philosophy & Theology



## Enriching the curriculum with Global Perspectives & Research

**As universities increasingly focus on performance in three subjects, there is scope to enrich the post-16 curriculum with cross-curricular courses designed to develop academic skills.**

Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives & Research (GPR) is one such course, allowing students to explore a range of ‘real-world’ issues while also undertaking independent research into a subject of their choice. This year, students at 266 schools across the world are taking Cambridge International AS & A Level and Cambridge Pre-U Global Perspectives & Research.

‘We see Cambridge Pre-U GPR as an “added value” qualification,’ says Cambridge Regional Director, UK & Ireland, Peter Monteath. ‘The course is designed to enhance awareness of our rapidly changing world, while also honing highly relevant academic skills such as independent research, critical thinking and problem solving, all of which support and enhance university preparation and subsequent undergraduate studies.’

In common with all Cambridge Pre-U syllabuses, GPR is a two-year, linear course. It is made up of two parts: Global Perspectives – a seminar-based exploration of global issues which is assessed by a written paper, an essay and a presentation; and an extended Research Report. Focused on skills rather than content, teachers can select from a range of global topics for classroom-based discussion, while choice of research topic is left to the student to decide – providing valuable lessons in research planning and execution.

‘Overall, the course helps students become more confident in their studies and more responsible for their work,’ says Peter. ‘As well as a qualification in its own right, Cambridge Pre-U GPR is also an ideal complement to increased specialisation, expanding students’ knowledge of current affairs while also developing vital academic skills and techniques.’



## Cambridge Pre-U Geographer wins RGS award



Charlotte Connell, of Charterhouse, has received an Excellence Award from the Royal Geographical Society (RGS; with the Institute of British Geographers) for achieving the highest marks nationally in the 2016 Cambridge Pre-U Geography examinations. Head of Geography at Charterhouse, Peter Price, said: 'We are extremely proud that Charlotte has been publicly recognised by the Royal Geographical Society for her academic excellence. This is a superlative achievement for Charlotte and for the geography department.'

Charlotte is now in her first year at the University of Edinburgh reading Geography.

## Top marks for LRGS



Two pupils from Lancaster Royal Grammar School (LRGS) have received awards for achieving the highest marks, nationally, for their Cambridge Pre-U qualifications – William Jacques (left) for Cambridge Pre-U Business Management and Rowan Stennett (right) for Cambridge Pre-U

English Literature. Miss Mitchell, LRGS Head of English, commented: 'Rowan's work ethic and thirst for knowledge was second to none and his commitment to wider reading and to the details of the course were outstanding – he's a truly gifted student.' Head of Sixth Form, Sarah Haigh, added: 'Will was full of entrepreneurial spirit during his time in the sixth form. He showed sheer enthusiasm, interest and aspiration throughout the course.'

William is now studying Marketing at the University of York and Rowan is studying Law at the University of Cambridge.

We recognise top performance in Cambridge Pre-U exams every year. Congratulations to all the other students who won awards for their exceptional results last year.

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### What's available

Here's a list of subjects for examination in 2018.

Mathematics  
Further Mathematics

Literature in English

Biology  
Chemistry  
Physics

French  
German  
Italian  
Mandarin Chinese  
Russian  
Spanish

Art History  
Classical Greek  
Geography  
History  
Latin  
Philosophy & Theology  
Psychology

Business & Management  
Economics

Art & Design  
Drama & Theatre  
Music

Global Perspectives & Research (a two-year extended project qualification).  
A Global Perspectives Short Course is also available.

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